

Book Reviews

Recensions

The Resilience Imperative, Co-operative Transitions to a Steady-State Economy

Mike Lewis and Pat Conaty
Gabriola Island, B.C: New Society Publishers, 2012

Reviewed by Launa Linaker, The University of Alberta

In the book *The Resilience Imperative, Co-Operative Transitions to a Steady-State Economy* Mike Lewis and Pat Conaty bring forward the importance of transitioning from business as usual to a steady-state economy; that is, moving from the current fossil fuel fed, growth economy to one that is smart, scalable, and sustainable. The authors introduce their SEE Change pedagogy as a mechanism to achieve this steady-state economy. It is a four-part methodology that requires one to first SEE Change (SEE= Social, Ecological, Economic), second to SEEK strategic pathways, third to SHARE what we are learning, and lastly, to SECURE the paths once they are cut. This book caught my attention right away because it draws heavily on the work of other experts that complement the authors' levels of expertise in the field, thereby earning immediate credibility. It is a comprehensive guide not only for strategic alternatives for revolutionizing how we act, but also for challenging assumptions on how we think, thus encouraging us to be deliberate in organizing our economic life so we secure a sustainable world for future generations. This book will appeal to a wide spectrum of readers: early adopters of social innovations that are facilitating the transition to a steady-state economy; those involved in leading and facilitating learning and change on issues such as, the demise of the moral economy, affordable housing, and sustainable food; students of business, economic development, ecology and sustainability; as well generalists who are curious about why these issues are so important. Overall, this volume offers a sound education on the history of capitalism and social innovations.

This book is both stimulating and overwhelming from the first page. Stimulating, because of the rich discourse and analysis embedded in all the chapters, which include citations from Boulding, Tuqueville, Mill, Keynes, Polanyi, Soddy, Thompson and other leading thinkers in economics, politics, and social philosophy. Invoking these writers brings forward a sense of urgency to reconceptualize our current economic paradigms in order to secure sustainable livelihoods for people today and for future generations. The overwhelming component of the book comes when one considers the how to bring about change. The authors muse whether it is even "possible for the beneficiaries of 150 years of fossil-fuel-fed economic growth to transcend

their own culture?"(16). To deal with the dissonance between the theory and the practicality of the proposed transition, Lewis and Conaty rightfully acknowledge the benefits accrued to humans since the discovery and manipulation of oil, and are even empathetic to our addictive attachment to fossil fuels; however, they stand firm that now is the time to address peak oil, climate change, and the decline of the ecosystem.

The challenge presented in writing about this timely topic is to move past the touching of the readers' hearts or moral compasses toward motivating them to action at either a personal or community level. I believe this challenge has been brilliantly met first through the analysis that gives substance to theories, and then through the case studies that bring experiences to life. For example, the key innovations they examine cover topics that the majority of citizens complain about, such as borrowing costs, affordable housing, energy, and sustainable food systems. The authors propose that many accept the status quo since they are not conscious of the harmful impact that their every choice has on our interconnected world. Further, most of us are unaware of alternative choices and even if we are, we are fearful of change. The authors bring about hope for the great transition and demonstrate alternatives by sharing case studies of social innovations in communities through the world. While these innovations of action left me in awe of the resilience of the communities involved, the innovations discussed also left me unsure of the role I play as an individual in the grand-resilience picture. That said, the authors' four-part SEE Change methodology is particularly relevant to apply this work to an educational context.

The SEE Change pedagogy of transition establishes a framework that can facilitate learning and change through skilful leading of minds. SEE Change asks people to shift perspectives to one of SEEing, that is, to consider the social, ecological, and environmental impacts of their choices. The challenge of such a shift is making people aware of what they do not know, compounded by the difficulty of encouraging people to alter their perspectives when certain values, beliefs, and behaviors are a cultural norm. However, the authors find opportunity in these challenges. Educational instructors are the agents of awareness, leading their students' minds towards SEEing change. Chapters one and two provide foundations for discussions, debates, and reflections on the current ideology of business as usual. The case studies, such as JAK Cooperative Bank or Mondragon are excellent teaching tools to demonstrate the seven key principles of resilience in the context of how to SEEK pathways, for example, reclaiming the commons, reinventing democracy, constructing a social solidarity economy, and pricing in consideration for people and the planet. The examples and concepts are comprehensive and not necessarily all easy to follow but do demonstrate the impact possible when "a quality of social capital - trust, collaboration, cooperation, and leadership – [are] rooted in the place where people live" (p. 25). Once awakened to SEEing, these students, our future leaders, may align with SEEKing strategic pathways to revolutionize the paradigm of business as usual.

I agree with the authors that once we are aware of the issues at hand it is important to SHARE this knowledge, and, if we have the position or power, to influence and to SECURE the paths that have been cut. While the SEE Change methodology could be construed as a flow chart, I see it as a wheel in motion where innovations have to be continuously monitored and evaluated for the current climate and culture of our time. This brings forward the importance of resilient communities and furthers the importance of having leaders who understand the resilience principles when moving towards a steady-state economy that is decentralized, localized, and regionalized.

The book's epilogue contains possibly the strongest cry to the reader's consciousness. Lewis and Conaty ask "what stories will we be able to tell our loved ones about what we did to

advance the Great Transition?" (p.344). This final sentence makes it is clear to me that this movement requires the collaboration, cooperation, and coordination of individuals, communities, businesses, and governments to advance the great transition. Yet, while my heart sings with hope, I still find some of the ideas Pollyannaish. Nevertheless, the authors have developed a comprehensive guide that dives deep into the moral compass of the human spirit, provides a beacon of light showing that change is possible, and shares strategic pathways that have or are becoming secure. I will use *The Resilience Imperative, Co-Operative Transitions to a Steady-State Economy* as a resource in my courses to awaken my students – society's future leaders – to SEE Change.